

## [Seamen's Stories]

Dup,

FOLKLORE

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NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Marion Charles Hatch

ADDRESS 862 First Ave.,

DATE June 20, '39

SUBJECT Seamen's Stories

1. Date and time of interview

During the week.

2. Place of interview

National Maritime Union of America, 126 11th Ave., N.Y.C.

3. Name and address of informant

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Seamen who contributed these stories were: Patrick John, Cormady (Left Rudder), Sitting Bull, T.C., Louis J, Luts, Stewardesses who contributed were Cecily Gordon, Frances Bryant

4. Name and address of person, if any ,who put you in touch with informant.

No one.

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

No.

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C

TEXT OF INTERVIEW (UNEDITED)

STATE New York

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SUBJECT Seamen's Stories

HOW'S YOUR HEAD?

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By Left Rudder

The pilot says to the quartermaster, the man at the wheel, "How is your head now?" The quartermaster replies. "God damned sore, pilot how's yours? You haven't got anything on your hip have you?"

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### WHAT KEEPS THE SHIP AFLOAT

By Left Rudder

A seaman's chaplain, who was always preaching to the seaman ashore against using obscene language made a trip one day to sea. The weather got very rough there. The chaplain went to the captain and he wanted to know if the ship was going to sink. The captain says to him, "You to back to the quarters and if you hear the seamen cursing and swearing you may be sure she aint gonna sink". The chaplain paid a couple of visits to the quarters, eavesdropping, listening into the porthole and in the midst of the storm he was overheard to say, "Thank God they're still cursing and swearing!"

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### NOT ENOUGH TO GO AROUND

By Left Rudder

A sailor found a cockroach In his soup before he was shipped. He goes to the galley to show the cook. He says to the cook, "Look what I got in my soup! A cockroach!" The cook says, "Sh! you know if the sailors knew I gave you one, they would all want one!"

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### GAS HOUND

By Sitting Bull

A gas hound is a man who drinks scat, bum liquor, 50 cents a pint. After drinking it for six months they never fall down. They're not able to. If they do they never get up again. This guy was standing up like this and a cop came along and just nudged him with the stick and he fell down.

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### THE LOST SEAMAN

By Cecily Gordon (Stewardess)

I was standing on deck in the beautiful sunshine, in the afternoon, and I saw a porpoise and I asked a seaman, "What are those porpoises?" and the seaman said, "They are the lost sailors." Then I asked about the seagulls and what are they and he said, "They are the lost stewardesses".

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### TROUSERS OVERBOARD

By Frances Bryant (Stewardess)

First of all, down in the engine room they have a rail, where all in the engine department do their washing and hang it up on the rail. So one time in Seattle, just about an hour before sailing, the chief engineer came aboard. It had been raining terrifically and the chief engineer was soaked. He was in uniform. So he went into his quarters. It was ten o'clock at night. We were sailing to Alaska. After going to his quarters he saw the third engineer

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on board so he took his uniform trousers off and said to the third engineer, "Take these and throw them over the rail!

So the poor old third engineer didn't realize what he was doing and he threw them over the rail, over the side. So the next day the chief engineer sent the oiler down to get his trousers off the rail. The oiler came up and said, "Chief, there's no trousers down there!" He said, "Sure there is the third engineer put them down there to dry."

The oiler went back and started looking around for the trousers. He couldn't find them so he went to the chief and the chief said to go to the third and ask him what he did to his trousers. The oiler went to the third and asked him. The third said, "He told me to throw them over the rail and I did!"

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## FLOATING LEAD

By Sitting Bull

You know what sounding is? Well they take a piece of lead an the end of a cord and the cord is marked off with the depths. You stand abeam or a little bit forward. Then you take the cord, swing it back and forth, and the lead on the end of it creates enough momentum to carry it far enough so that when the ship comes abeam of the weight the weight will be at the bottom and you read the sounding off of the cord in fathoms.

There was a fellow sounding, an ordinary. He didn't quite understand the principal of it, that he had to get the lead far enough forward so that it would be at the bottom when he came abreast of it. The guy on the starboard side was hollering all his sounding, fast, as he made them, one sounding about every two minutes. This guy kept swinging and he couldn't get her out far enough. He was really intent on his job but he just couldn't get it

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through his knob he was supposed to get that lead out there. He didn't have the knack of it.

The skipper blasted him through the megaphone. He hollered, "Hey, what's wrong with your soundings?" The guy was flabbergasted. It penetrated through such a thick fog that he jumped. He hollered up to the bridge, "The lead won't sink, sir!"

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### DECK ENGINEER'S DUTIES

By Sitting Bull

There was a dope, from up on the Great Lakes, came down and sailed as a dock engineer. Not especially because he was qualified for this job but because his discharges merited it. So he was a dirty bastard, bodily dirty. Nobody like him and he didn't know his job. His name was Peterson, incidentally.

They finally got him down in the engine room one day and told him, on that ship, being a deck engineer called for cleaning out the bilges. He was so poorly qualified for the job he didn't know any better. So he didn't know to clean bilges either. They told him to strip off his duds and get down there and get to work. They told him that was the only way it could be done. He believed 5 then and went down. The bilge, in the deepest part, is about four feet.

He ducked his head to scoop water-soaked rags, that had sunk, and they threw more in. They had him down there for about four hours, submerged most of the time. That was more or less punishment for his not changing his undershirt.

They short-strung his bunk a couple of times. Unlocked the springs on the bunk and tied it with string. When you pile in you go through and hit the deck. Then they short-sheeted him. Take off the top sheet and double the bottom one over so you think you've got two

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sheets and you've only got one. When you try to get in between the sheets you can only go half way.

Of course there's other ways to get a man to take a bath. Throw his clothes under the shower and then he has to go under after them. In port they will throw a guy over the side once in a while.

Most of that is gone now. Anything they don't want to tolerate they don't have to, now, on account of the union.

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### STEWED OILER

By T.C.

One little oiler, he got stewed, and they treated one eye with mecurochrome and the other one with blue ink. Then they put stripes all over him until he looked like a zebra.

### ORDERS OUT THE CAPTAIN

By S.B.

This guy was an old duck and he used to come down to the fire room and chip paint, chip the bed spots preparatory to painting. He was the skipper.

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He was chipping pipes this afternoon and turned one of the valves in the fire room.

It was the wrong valve and the steam pressure started going down. The fireman told him to got to hell out and never come back without the engineer with him. The fireman is the next to lowest. There's a wiper and then a fireman.

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## WALK-OFF

By Louis J. Luts

We just called a sit-down strike on all five ships of the Baltimore Mail. The reason of the strike was we wanted them all hired from the national Maritime Union Hall. Four of us was hired M.M.U. Hall and one wasn't. That was the reason of the strike. At that time I was on the City of Newport News and we all walked off the ship except the fireman who was on watch. So in order to make it a perfect walk-off I went down below and told the man to shut the oil off and walk off the ship with us. To this he took a swing at me and told me to get to hell out of the fire room. So I slugged him myself and shut the oil off and carried him up on the top side of the deck. Then I was arrested later.

So he was carried off in the this walk-off.

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## THE CATCH-ALL

By S. B.

A lot of people aren't aware of the fact that whenever a ship is in port there's always a large cargo net under the gangway, a catch-all, to catch any sailors who came back in the middle of the night stinko and happen to fall off the gangway into this net.

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Sometimes in the morning you see some very strange sights in these nets.

Another thing used aboard ship quite a bit is a fire-axe mostly because of their convenience and usually as a result of the condition of the seamen. The fire-axe is the



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most used weapon aboard a ship for opening a can of beer, opening bottles, opening  
lookers, key lost, its used as a great equalizer when two seamen get into a fight and one  
has the losing end of it. The reason for using the axe is one must get so used to leaving it  
in his hand that he would be able to use it in afire.

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### ENOUGH OF THE SEA

By S. B.

I have a friend who was on the Morro Castle when it went down. This fellow was just a  
young fellow and then quit the sea because the first three ships he was on two of them  
sank and the last one burned up. That was the Morro Castles.

He said on the Morro Castle at the time the fire occurred, the chief mate who was acting  
skipper at that time, sent the seamen below to wake up the passengers. This was before  
the union and the men aboard this ship were very inexperienced. So as soon as they got  
below, rather than bother with the passengers they all dove over the side. In his opinion  
this was the cause of it being such a disaster.

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